



Derbyshire Healthy  
Futures Service

Live  
Life  
Better 

# The Hunger Scale



Hunger is a completely natural sensation and not something to be feared. The Hunger Scale we've created for you to use is a way to describe your level of hunger and help you to recognise when the best times to start and stop eating occur during your day.

- Comfortable Eating
- 1 Beyond hungry: you may have a headache and experience dizziness and a lack of concentration. Your body feels totally out of energy and you need to lie down.
  - 2 You feel irritable and cranky, with little energy. You may also feel nauseous.
  - 3 Your stomach feels empty and the urge to eat is strong.
  - 4 You start to think about food. Your body is giving you the signal that you might want to eat.
  - 5 Your body has had enough food to keep going and is physically and psychologically just starting to feel satisfied.
  - 6 You are fully satisfied and full up.
  - 7 You are feeling past the point of satisfaction, yet you can still find room for a little more. Your body might say no but your mind says yes, so you take a few more bites.
  - 8 Your stomach is starting to really ache. You probably know you shouldn't have had more, but it tasted so good.
  - 9 You now feel really uncomfortable, heavy, tired, and bloated.
  - 10 Beyond full: this is a typical Christmas Day sort of feeling – you are physically miserable, don't want to or can't move, and feel like you never want to look at food again. Not a good point to reach!

## Using the scale for weight loss

The Hunger Scale is a great way to work out the best time to stop eating and still feel satisfied and full. Remember to keep fluid levels up so that you can recognise and feel real hunger when it is not confused with thirst. Most people enjoy their food and eat comfortably when they are between 3-6 on the scale.

Your own experiences may differ from this and from those described on our scale, so you could always experiment with developing your own scale in your own words to measure how it is in a way that makes sense for you.

By using a hunger scale you should also find that you eat less for comfort or out of boredom and begin to listen to your body and your physical need for food. You can also use the scale together with using a food diary.

You can make a note of thoughts or feelings linked to your eating and record how hungry you are before, during and after eating. Reflecting on these can be a powerful and effective way to find out more about what influences your own particular eating habits.

## What should I do if I get really hungry?

This tends to happen if you ignore your hunger signals or skip meals. It can also happen at busy points during the day where you might not have time to prepare and eat some food. The signs that you've reached this point could be feeling light-headed,

jittery or irritable; you might find yourself at a 1 or 2 on the hunger scale. At this stage you will probably feel a strong urge to "eat everything now"! It's not always easy but take a moment and follow these three steps:

Eat a little bit of something (e.g. a piece of fruit or a cracker) to get up to 3 on the scale.

Wait 10 to 15 minutes and see how your hunger level is now.

If you'd still rate your hunger as 3, then eat your planned meal. Eat normally until you reach 5 or 6 on the scale.

## Getting the most out of The Hunger Scale

---

The Hunger Scale encourages you to pay careful attention to your body and what it is telling you. Here are some ideas about how to use the scale to help you know when to start and stop eating. Repeating these over time will help you become more tuned into and able to manage your hunger so you feel more in control of your eating habits.

### **Before you eat**

Close your eyes and focus your attention on your stomach. Set aside any knowledge you have about when you last ate and simply let your stomach give you a number. Your body should naturally feel hunger (3 on the scale) around every 3-5 hours after you eat a meal.

If you want to eat or feel hunger other than in your stomach area, you are probably eating for an emotional reason or out of habit, so try to find an alternative way to comfort yourself rather than eating. Our *Changing Patterns* and *Finding Happiness* leaflets have got lots of tips and advice to help you with this.

### **During a meal**

Eat slowly to allow yourself to see how full you are getting. Listen for

the body signals that tell you that you are no longer hungry (check back to The Hunger Scale for these). Look out for the signs that you're comfortably full and try not to reach the point of feeling stuffed. Stopping when you're halfway through your meal to check your fullness is a good way to make sure you don't overeat.

### **Finishing a meal**

Stop eating when you are around 5 or 6 on The Hunger Scale, even if that means leaving food on your plate. Stopping at a higher number or convincing yourself that you need to leave a completely clear plate means you have probably taken in more food than your body needs.

Remember, most people enjoy their food and eat comfortably when they are between a 3 and a 6 on The Hunger Scale.